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# Book Review: Genocide of the Mind: New Native American Writing

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*Genocide of the Mind: New Native American Writing*. Edited by MariJo Moore. Foreword by Vine Deloria Jr. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2003. xvi + 352 pp. $16.95 paper.

*Genocide of the Mind* is hardly the happiest of titles. Not only is the metaphor itself a muddle impossible to imagine, but the collection's dominant tone is more about cultural survival, not cultural genocide, as the editor herself indicates in explaining the title: "This anthology is a testament to American Indian consciousness continuing to circulate, regardless of past or present genocidal attempts, whether cerebral, endemic, systematic, or otherwise." Confusing, too, is the book's ostensible focus on the "urban Indian" and the sad history of Relocation as government policy. This is what Vine Deloria Jr.'s foreword would have us believe, and the first section of essays is indeed about "Keeping the Home Fires Burning in Urban Circles." But the collection is ultimately, like many such anthologies, a hodgepodge of essays arranged into various ad hoc categories, such as "Young American Indians," "Native Languages," and "Indians as Mascots." The title of the final section, "Who We Are," offers a clearer summation, after all, of this collection's articulation of Native identity. In sum, while many of the essays do "write back" against the Euro-American ideology of cultural genocide, the reader seeking a focused raison d'être here may well come away disappointed.

Those interested in Native literatures, however, will be pleased by many of the individual essays and impressed by the inclusion of previously published work by such longtime Native luminaries as Leslie Silko, Simon Ortiz, Paula Gunn Allen, Maurice Kenny, and Carter Revard. Of even greater interest, perhaps, are the younger writers included here. Newcomers Mary Black Bonnet, Joel Waters, Neil McKay, and Ben Geobe all ably augment Deloria and Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve in representing the Lakota/Dakota perspective; and younger Cherokee, Osage, and Anishinaabe authors also

get their ample due. At last, if the heyday of Momaday and Silko initiated a shift of interest from Native writers of the Great Plains to those of the desert Southwest, this collection offers some redress to that geo-literary exodus.

The Great Plains is the setting, too, of David Seals's incredible essay, "Buffalo Medicine," is certainly the most avant-garde in style of the works herein—and also the most controversial, in its Deep-Ecology defense of the buffalo of the Black Hills. Indeed, Seals's naturism leads me to a final quibble, regarding the editor's introduction to the "Indians as Mascots" section. "Indians are human beings, not animals," she writes: "Therefore we should not be used as mascots." But the human/animal distinction is not one that a Native American should glibly make. From traditional Native creation stories, through Nicholas Black Elk, to contemporary poets such as Ortiz, Revard, and Kenny—and, indeed, in many of the essays in this very collection—the crucial perception that humans *are* animals and thus partake in a fellowship with other species should never be forgotten, whatever the specific human political matters of the day. There are other genocides—of other species—taking place as we speak, and each loss is the death of an "*oyate*," of a "first nation." The blithe assertion that "humans are not animals" at least allows, if not fosters, such an ongoing genocide.

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